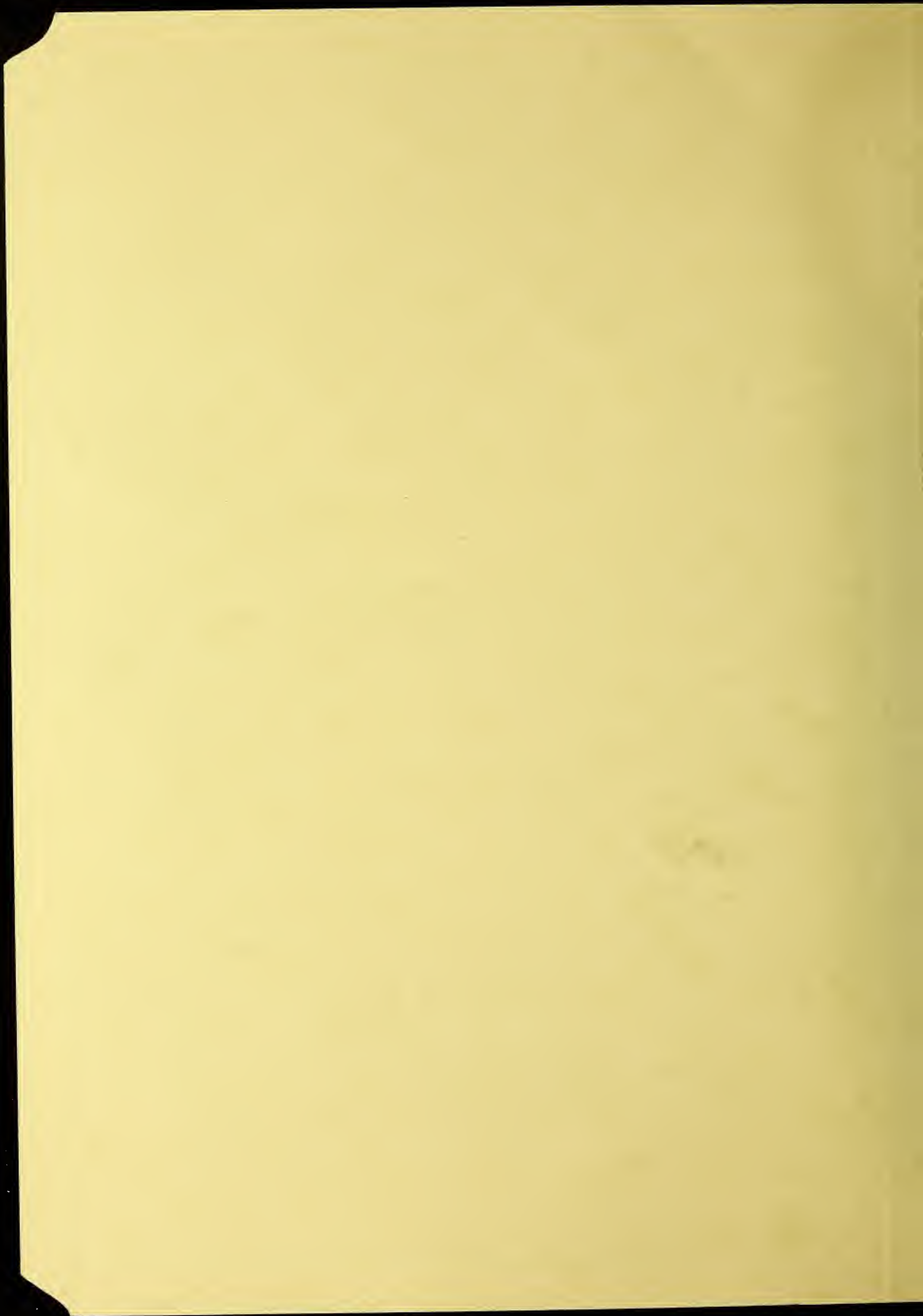


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Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

Allen Sharp

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection
(formerly referenced as Manuscript Files)

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S HOOSIER YEARS:
FOUNDATION FOR THINGS TO COME

English Historian H. G. Wells described Abraham Lincoln in his early years as "a drifting particle in the general westward flow of population." However, of his Presidency Wells said: "He held the United States together through long weary months of reverses and ineffective effort, through black phases of division and failing courage, and there is no record that he ever faltered in his purpose."

The fundamental result of the life of Abraham Lincoln was the preservation of the Federal Union. If his personality had not cut across American History so deeply we would not take time interrupt a busy schedule to honor him today. There is also a fundamental interrelationship between his growth in Indiana and his words and deeds later.

"I grew up in Indiana" was Lincoln's terse description of the one-quarter of his life spent in Carter Township, Spencer County, Indiana. He came in December 1816, almost on the exact date of Statehood. Indiana had fifteen counties.

When he left 14 years later Indiana had 60 counties and her population had more than doubled.

Volumes and entire libraries have been devoted to every possible facet of the words and deeds of this man.

The best collection of this material in the entire world is owned by Lincoln National Life Insurance Company in Fort Wayne.

It is to the former curator of this collection, Dr. Louis A. Warren, that we owe the best and most carefully considered insights into the "Indiana Years" as he calls his volume on the subject. With grace and incisiveness he separates fact from fantasy. Any public official in Indiana worth his salt might well consider this carefully drawn account. (Even people who are not candidates for high state office.)

In these formative Hoosier years we see the development of character traits that were to emerge large at a later time.

His early fascination with words was far beyond the norm for a 7 year old, then or now. Even though the youngest member of the family, at age 7, he was writing the family letters for those left behind in Kentucky. Of this Dr. Warren states:

"Letter writing by an adult on the frontier was an accomplishment,

but for a lad of 7 years almost unbelievable. It is impossible to evaluate the significance of this early way of expression by the boy Abraham. Possibly we have living in this newly built Indiana cabin one whom some psychologists would call a "gifted child."

The Indiana years were filled with efforts to get and read books. In addition to the Bible, which was read and reread in the Lincoln home, young Abe soon mastered the standard fare of school books available, including such classics as Webster's Speller. It was the announced purpose of the texts to impart knowledge and influence good moral conduct. By age 10 he had read and memorized long passages from Aesop's Fables, Robinson Crusoe, Pilgrim's Progress, and The Arabian Nights. His cousin, Dennis Hanks unbraided him for reading the latter, labeling it a "pack of lies." Lincoln responded "mighty fine lies."

Life in the 1820's in Southern Indiana was grim and primitive. Carl Sandburg puts the following words in the mouth of Dennis Hanks, "We lived the same as the Indians 'ceptin' we took an interest in politics and religion."

In his teens he was acquiring and reading some real heavy stuff. The formal titles to some of these books are interesting and revealing.

(a) The Life of George Washington, with Curious Anecdotes Equally Honorable to Himself and Exemplary to His Young Countrymen. Embellished with Six Steel Engravings, by M. L. Weems, formerly Rector of Mt. Vernon Parish, (1809)(read at age 12)

(b) The Life of Dr. Benjamin Franklin Written by Himself
(read at age 13)

(c) An Authentic Narrative of the Loss of the American Brig Commerce With an Account of the Sufferings of Her Surviving Officers and Crew by James Riley (read at age 14)

(d) The Life of General Francis Marion, a Celebrated Partisan Officer in the Revolutionary War Against the British and Tories in South Carolina and Georgia by Brig. Gen. P. Harry of Marion's Brigade and M. L. Weems (read at age 18)

(e) The Life of George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Armies of the U.S. throughout the War which Established their Independence and First President of the U.S. by Dr. David Ramsey (read at age 18)

(f) History of the U.S. from the First Settlement as Colonies to the Cession of Florida in 1821 Comprising every Important Political Event by William Crimshaw (read about age 18)

(g) The Columbia Class Book Consisting of Geographical, Historical and Biographical Extracts by Dr. A. T. Lowe (read late

teens)

(h) The Kentucky Preceptor Containing a Number of Useful Lessons for Reading and Speaking by a Teacher (read in late teens)

(i) and finally, A Universal Etymological English Dictionary, Comprehending the derivations of the generality of words in the English tongue . . . and also a brief and clear explication of all different words . . . Together with a large collection and explication of words and phrases used in our ancient statutes, charters, writs . . . Also a collection of our most common proverbs with their explication . . . by Nathan Bailey.

Through David Turnham, a lawyer and constable, who lived near the Lincoln home, he acquired the 1824 version of the Indiana laws entitled The Revised Laws of Indiana, adopted and enacted by the General Assembly at their eighth session. To which are prefixed the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, the Constitution of the State of Indiana, and sundry

other documents connected with the Political History of the Territory and State of Indiana, arranged published by authority of the General Assembly. (The original of this volume is preserved in the Indiana University Library) Senator Albert J. Beveridge says Lincoln "read it repeatedly." Herndon says he "fairly devoured it."

By the time he left Indiana several lines of personal development are clear. Basic to all of them is unusual ability in the art of communication. By 1830 he had a good local reputation as a storyteller and speaker. Beyond this personal ability we see the formulation of his choice of a vocation and his attitude toward his country and his God.

His first known experience in court was before Squire Pate, J.P., Lewisport, Kentucky, charged with illegally operating a ferry boat on the Ohio without a license. Based on the young man's good faith and a technical interpretation of the Kentucky statute the charges were dismissed. Squire Pate invited Lincoln to return as an observer, an invitation which he undoubtedly accepted.

Court watching was the leading spectator sport and Lincoln lived about equal distance from the court houses of Warrick, Perry and Spencer Counties. He knew several of the leading lawyers of the area, John A. Brackenridge, of Boonville, John Pitcher of

Rockport, and David Turnham, and borrowed books from them. A 2 volume set of Blackstone inscribed "A. Lincoln" belonged to John Pitcher. He probably also knew Ratliff Boon, a Warrick County lawyer who served as the first Lieutenant Governor and Second Governor of our State.

Six years after leaving Indiana Lincoln was admitted to the Illinois bar and very soon became a highly competent "lawyer's lawyer." He handled big cases, for important clients and earned substantial fees. He charged the Illinois Central Railroad \$5000.00 for representing it in a property tax case and had to sue it to collect. The official report of the case is Illinois Central Railroad v. Morrison, 17 Ill. 291 (1854).

During the 1840's and 1850's it was commonplace for members of Congress to earn extra spending money by arguing cases before the Supreme Court of the United States. No less a personage than Daniel Webster did so regularly.

During his one term in the United States House of Representatives Lincoln argued the case of Lewis v. Lewis, 7 Howard 776 (1849). It was a complex case which the record shows Lincoln presented in a

highly professional manner. His notes for argument in the Supreme Court graphically demonstrate his ability to go to the very heart of a complex proposition in few words. Years later Justice Holmes would call this talent "striking at the juglar."

In 1855 there was a case involving the patent to the McCormich Reaper in Federal Court in Cincinnati. Lincoln was to work with a Cincinnati lawyer named Edwin M. Stanton but the latter got Lincoln dismissed from the case and proceeded to use Lincoln's research. Stanton then referred to Lincoln as a "long-legged baboon."

Lincoln had two endearing qualities as a lawyer. He was a strong advocate of prompt attention to business and a practitioner of using plain, simple and few words in preparing legal documents and arguments.

John M. Duff, a New York lawyer and author of A. Lincoln Prairie Lawyer says of Lincoln's prowess as a lawyer: "No Illinois lawyer of his day could do so many things so well, a fact which was ungrudgingly conceded by his colleagues at the bar. Every once in a while a lawyer comes along who attains the sure mark of greatness-the unstinted praise of his co-workers. Lincoln was supremely that kind of lawyer."

As a legislator he soon mastered the parliamentary art as a leader of the "Long Nine" from Sangamon County. He fought, and narrowly won, the battle to remove the capital from Vandalia to Springfield. In the 1838 session the majority tried a lockup to keep the Whig minority, including Lincoln, from breaking a quorum. Lincoln and two other Whigs jumped out of the window and hid. (I should remind you the Illinois Legislature was then meeting in a one-story building.)

His attitude toward his country emerged early.

In regard to The Revised Laws of Indiana, Louis A. Warren says "over and over again he must have read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States contained therein." He was always concerned with first principles and essentials. It is fortunate for the history of this land that he was early exposed to the basic documents and ideas of this nation. Lincoln is known to have borrowed the July 4, 1826 issue of a leading paper which was filled with articles and editorials about the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the deaths, on that same day, of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Lincoln is said to have been able to repeat almost verbatim the contents of the articles and editorials. As a result he wrote an article which may have been

published stating "the American Government was the best form of government in the world . . . that it ought to be kept sacred and preserved forever . . . that the constitution should be sacred, the Union perpetuated . . ." Even in complex and sometimes cynical times it would behoove all of us in positions of governmental responsibility to occasionally reach back and more closely consider the underlying philosophy that prevailed at the inception of this nation. Such an exercise might not solve all of today's complex problems but it would provide a much needed backdrop and prospective against which present solutions might be examined.

Lincoln learned his lessons in American History and Government well and he never forgot them. He possessed a clear understanding of the origins and nature of the Federal Union. He believed it was worth salvaging and he was at the right place and time to do so. Although he was a highly practical and pragmatic politician-legislator who advocated compromise, he steadfastly turned his back to anything short of preserving the Federal Union. As Dr. Ard Hoven told a legislative prayer breakfast here last year, it is easy to excuse compromise of principle in the name of "circumstances." No circumstances could cause Lincoln to compromise with preserving the

Federal Union. Of his many critics during this period, Sir Winston Churchill said they "failed to see moral courage when it was staring them in the face." Who can deny that this steadfastness of purpose is not related to a copy of Indiana Revised Statutes borrowed from a pioneer lawyer in Southern Indiana in 1828.

Lastly, and most fundamentally, we consider Lincoln's attitude toward his God.

The Bible was the very center of the Thomas Lincoln home and is the only book he owned. (The original is preserved at Hodgenville, Kentucky. It was a much used and discussed book. It profoundly influenced his life and literary style. The Second Inaugural, although brief, makes 14 references to deity, 3 to prayer and contains 3 quotations from the Bible.

In the Little Pigeon Creek Baptist Church where Thomas Lincoln was a trustee, young Lincoln heard his first public speaking. Also, it was here that he heard the first public outcry against the institution of slavery from the pulpit.

There can be no question that Lincoln went through a period of doubt. Sandburg calls these "shadows and questionings." In his own words, "Through all I groped my way until I found a stronger and higher grasp of thought, one that reached beyond this life with a clearness and satisfaction I had never known before. The Scriptures unfolded before me a deeper and more logical appeal,

through these new experiences, than anything else I could find to turn to, or ever before had found in them The fundamental truths reported in the four gospels that I first heard from the lips of my mother, are settled and fixed moral precepts with me." Lincoln was quite literally a religious purist not unlike many of the so-called Jesus generation of our own time. As they, he attempted to reach back beyond man's institutions to the basic precepts of the faith. His questioning centered on what man had done with that faith and not its intrinsic validity.

Dr. Arnold Gesell, an imminent authority on child development once said: "The fourteen Indiana years have a strategic position in the life cycle. They comprise one full fourth of Abraham Lincoln's life span of 56 years. The Indiana years are highly formative, occupying as they do the long interval between early childhood and young manhood. At the age of 28 years Lincoln reaches exactly the midpoint of his career. He leaves rural Illinois for the practice of law in metropolitan Springfield. The preparatory years then bear fruit."

There are many desirable quotations appropriate for a conclusion here. I have chosen a statement made by Lincoln as a member of the Illinois Legislature at the age of 28 in 1837.

Although this statement is not new it is still true. He said

"At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant to step the ocean and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia, and Africa combine, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest, with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not by force take a drink from the Ohio or make a track on the Blue Ridge.

At what point is the approach of danger to be expected?

I answer, if it ever reach us it must spring from among us; it cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen we must live through all time or die by suicide!"

I still believe that life and thought of Lincoln are of such import to justify our consideration of these thoughts today.

I thank you for the opportunity to present these remarks.

STATE OF INDIANA

APPELLATE COURT

ALLEN SHARP, JUDGE



INDIANAPOLIS 46204

ROOM 425
633-4300

February 16, 1972

ash
2/21/72

Curator
Lincoln National Life Insurance Company
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Sir:

You will find enclosed a copy of remarks which I made to both houses of the Indiana Legislature in commemoration of the 163rd birthday of Abraham Lincoln this year.

I thought you might be interested in the contents.
Best wishes.

Very truly yours,

Allen Sharp
Allen Sharp

AS/dbh

Encl.

